

OVERVIEW OF COMPETITIVE UNICYCLE TRIALS

A unicycle trials competition takes place on a “course” with about 30 – 50 pre-set “sections”, depending on the event. The goal is to complete (clean) each section from start to finish without falling off. These sections could be constructed from boulders, logs, urban features, built materials, or anything else that the course setter imagines might be rideable.

With its founding in the 1990’s, competitive unicycle trials is the most recent advent in a long history of cycle trials, which dates back to the 1970’s for bikes and the early 1900’s for motorcycles. The first known unicyclist to formally enter a bike trials event was the Alaskan pioneer George Peck, at the 1993 Colorado Fat Tire Festival. Later, another hint of what was to come came at the 1998 California Mountain Unicycle Weekend, where John Foss organized the “Jenkinson Lake Wheel Dip”. At this event we took turns attempting to ride to the waters edge, get our tire wet, and finish a circuit through bouldery slickrock.

From 1998 – 2006, I rode for the Norco Factory Trials Team, alongside Robin Coope, one of the key organizers at the time for bike trials competitions in North America. Being part of this scene, it seemed natural to adapt the concept more formally for unicyclists. In 1999, I adapted the bike trials rules for unicycle riders and had the chance to initiate the first sanctioned unicycle trials event at the 1999 U.S. unicycling championships, held that year in Snoqualmie Pass, Washington.

But despite great success at the 1999 event, it was apparent from the beginning that bike trials rules don’t work very well for unicycle riders. In bike trials, riders attempting a section receive a penalty point every time they put a foot on the ground (a “dab”). Ultimately, the lowest scoring rider wins. But — and here’s the problem for unicyclists — dabbing with a hand or two feet gives 5 penalty points and ends the rider’s attempt. This is a serious limita-



tion for a sport where you tend to come completely off the unicycle in a fall.

Besides this limitation, I also wasn’t a fan of the negative concept of penalizing dabs, which tends to result in a nervous riding style and mistakes from being afraid to commit. It seemed better to find a way to reward success rather than penalize failure and to promote riding that was closer to what every trials rider does naturally: conceive a line and attempt it until they get it. And since we had a new sport, we could do anything we wanted. I re-wrote the rules based loosely around those for bouldering competitions in rock climbing. These became the official rules for the sport and in 2002 we held the first World Unicycle Trials Champion-



ships, hosted in Washington State as part of the larger World Unicycling Championships and Convention (UNICON).

HERE ARE THE ESSENTIALS ON HOW A UNICYCLE TRIALS COMPETITION IT WORKS:

Each section in a unicycle trials course is worth one point. Riders earn a point by successfully cleaning a section from start to finish. A rider can attempt a section as many times as they wish, until they succeed or give up and go on to the next. The objective is to earn as many points as possible by cleaning as many sections as possible. At the end of a specified time period, the rider with the most points is the winner.

To download an official copy of the unicycle trials rules and guidelines for setting trials courses, search for the International Unicycling Federation Rulebook at www.iufinc.org.

ABOVE The World Trials Championships at UNICON, Wellington, New Zealand. JOHN FOSS

PAGE LEFT Darja Schlote pulls over a pallet at a trials competition in Faxeledplads, Denmark. EGON BECKER